

MEDIA BRIEFING SHEET

April 1, 2010

What is the Recreation Passport?

The Recreation Passport is simply a different way to pay for the management of state parks, recreation areas and forest recreation programs, as well as to support local units of government in bringing quality outdoor recreation opportunities to their communities. This initiative grew out of a proposal developed by the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks. It replaces the traditional state park and boating Motor Vehicle Permit (MVP) system currently in place at state parks, recreation areas and boat launches.

What Does the Legislation Do?

The legislation, known as the state's Recreation Passport, allows motorists to "opt in" to support Michigan state parks, state forest campgrounds and local parks by agreeing to pay an additional \$10 when renewing their license plates through the Secretary of State. The passport will be required for entry to state parks, recreation areas and boating access sites. The \$10 fee will authorize entry into state parks and boat launches during the one-year registration period, but additional camping fees would remain in place.

Opting in saves regular park users money and provides important funding to help protect Michigan's natural resources and provide world-class recreational opportunities. In addition, the passport gives residents the chance to protect the park and forest system's legacy for future visitors, even if they choose not to visit a park themselves.

The legislation also eliminates the resident Motor Vehicle Permit (MVP) – or window sticker – for state park entrance. Every motorist who chooses the passport is actually saving \$14 per vehicle, when compared to the current \$24 MVP fee.

Motorists who opt in to the system will be given stickers to apply to their license plates, indicating they paid the \$10 State Recreation Passport fee. Those who decide not to pay the \$10 fee when renewing their license plates but later want to visit a state park or boating access site will be required to purchase the Recreation Passport (for a possibly higher fee) upon entry to the park or site.

Out-of-state visitors will still be required to purchase non-resident stickers at a cost of \$29 annually or \$8 daily, as they do now.

This legislation does not take effect until Oct. 1, 2010, which means anyone planning to visit a state park this year must buy a Motor Vehicle Permit.

The revenue generated by this legislation will be split between state parks, state recreation areas, state forest campgrounds, state boating access sites, state non-motorized trails and pathways, and local parks for operation and infrastructure improvements and for cultural and historic resource protection at state parks. It will provide a stable funding

source for many of Michigan's outdoor recreation facilities, allowing them to be maintained and operated for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

Why Is This Legislation Needed?

Michigan's state parks and recreation areas at one time enjoyed robust General Fund (state tax) support so that outdoor recreation opportunities would be accessible and affordable for Michigan's citizens and visitors. However, in recent years the state's economy has struggled and in 2004 General Fund support was eliminated from the state parks budget. Today, Michigan state parks and recreation areas receive no General Fund support, relying completely on Motor Vehicle Permit and camping fees, along with an annual share of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (as established by Proposal P in 1994).

State forest campgrounds and pathways were previously supported by General Fund dollars, but those funds have been reduced every year, forcing the DNRE to close 12 state forest campgrounds in the spring of 2009.

The Michigan Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks recently identified \$38 million in immediate infrastructure needs and repairs in our state parks. In 2011, all fund balances will be exhausted. The current user-based fee system cannot sustain even basic maintenance needs. The Passport legislation is intended to prevent drastic cuts to Michigan park and forest programs.

State Parks and State Forest Campgrounds – What's the Difference?

Depending on the visitor's desired experiences, Michigan's DNRE provides a wide range of camping and recreational opportunities.

Michigan's 98 state parks and recreation areas spread across both peninsulas, ranging from the rugged wilderness of the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park in the western Upper Peninsula to the sleek, urban setting at William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor on downtown Detroit's riverfront. The state parks and recreation areas are managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment's Recreation Division.

State parks and recreation areas offer diverse camping experiences, ranging from full utility hookups which support motor homes and RVs, to rustic campsites. In addition to camping, these parks offer a variety of alternative lodging, such as cabins, yurts, teepees and lodges. Most state parks provide modern restroom and shower facilities for guests. Seventy-one state parks across the state have campgrounds, offering more than 13,500 campsites.

State park and recreation area visitors can enjoy a wide variety of recreation experiences, including non-motorized trail use including five major state park linear trails, picnicking, swimming, fishing, boating, hunting and interpretive programs. Many of the parks offer extraordinary and unique examples of Michigan's historical and cultural past. State parks

bring visitors in contact with unique natural resources ranging from waterfalls to prairies. Depending on what visitors are seeking, state park experiences range from quite wildlife photography and mushroom picking to an ORV scramble area on the sand dunes.

The 133 state forest campgrounds are managed by the DNRE's Forest Management Division. They cater to the more rustic camping experience, and do not feature electrical hookups or shower buildings. These campgrounds provide campers with vault toilets and water hand pumps, plus each campsite is outfitted with a table and a fire ring. These campgrounds feature sites suitable for tent or pop-up trailers, and 5th wheel trailers and motor homes are welcome.

State forest campgrounds providing more than 3200 campsites, are dispersed throughout Michigan's nearly 4 million acres of state forests, throughout the Upper Peninsula and the northern Lower Peninsula. Located on rivers or lakes, state forest campgrounds provide an array of recreation opportunities on the water, including fishing, canoeing and kayaking. Many state forest campgrounds are also located near non-motorized hiking, biking or equestrian trails; or near motorized ORV, motorcycle and snowmobile trails.

Additionally, the DNRE administers nearly 1,000 public boating access sites throughout the state. Revenues from the State Recreation Passport will be used to help develop and maintain this statewide network of sites.

Where Does the Money Go?

The first \$10.7 million received each fiscal year will be deposited in the restricted State Park Improvement Fund.

The next \$1,030,000 received each fiscal year will be deposited in the restricted Waterways Fund.

Up to \$1 million per fiscal year will be reserved for necessary expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in administration and implementation of the passport fee.

Starting on Oct. 1, 2010, these revenues replace the revenue once collected for park entry and boating access site fees, which will be replaced by the Recreation Passport.

The balance will be deposited as described below.

- 50 percent in the restricted State Park Improvement Fund for capital improvements at state parks, including recreation areas.
- 30 percent in the restricted State Park Improvement Fund for operations and maintenance at state parks, including recreation areas.
- 10 percent in the new Local Public Recreation Facilities Fund for development of public recreation facilities for local units of government.

- 7 percent in the Forest Recreation Account for the operation of, maintenance of and capital improvements to the state forest system of pathways and non-motorized trails, including equestrian trails.
- 2.75 percent in the restricted State Park Improvement Fund for operations, maintenance and capital improvements of state park cultural and historic resources.
- 0.25 percent in the restricted State Park Improvement Fund to promote, in concert with other state agencies, the use of state parks, state-operated public boating access sites, state forest campgrounds and state forest non-motorized trails and pathways; and to promote the use of the Internet for state park camping reservations and for payment of the Recreation Passport fee in conjunction with motor vehicle registration.

Find out more about Michigan's state parks, recreation areas and state forest campgrounds at www.michigan.gov/stateparks or by calling (517) 373-9900.